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ABSTRACT

Educational administration programs have an obligation to link theory with practical applications. However, the content of programs must also emphasize that aspiring administrators have a moral responsibility to eradicate the "isms"--classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism. This paper asserts that administrators must develop a sensitivity to and understanding of other ethnic cultures, be prepared to reduce discrimination against stigmatized cultural groups, and be able to develop problem-resolution strategies. The Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Educational Administration program designed and implemented a course to examine current problems in human relations and cultural awareness. The paper highlights the following questions: Should we have a specific course designed to address the "isms"?; How should we address the "isms" in preparing educational leaders? and Are we adequately preparing educational leaders to deal with the "isms"? (LMI)

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Preparing Educational Leaders To Eradicate the 'isms'

A Paper Presented at The Annual International Congress on Challenges to Education:

Balancing Unity and Diversity in a Changing World

by

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ABSTRACT

As we look at balancing unity and diversity in a changing world, it is imperative we either design courses or infuse in current courses a component of dealing with the "isms", i.e., classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism. As we prepare administrators we have an obligation to teach theory and bridge it with practical applications. We have the opportunity to live in a society where cultural diversity is the norm rather than the exception. With respect to diversity, it is important we place a special emphasis on teaching educational leaders that when they become administrators they have a moral responsibility to place a strong emphasis on eradicating the "isms". Administrators need to develop a sensitivity to and an understanding of other ethnic cultures and be prepared to reduce discrimination against stigmatized cultural groups and be able to evolve strategies for problem resolution. A specific course with this objective in mind has been designed and implemented in the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Educational Administration program. A number of introspective activities have been designed for students to do some "soul searching" about their own possible prejudices. In addition, numerous video excerpts, case studies, field experiences as well as a group project is completed. The primary objective is to examine current problems in human relations and cultural awareness with an emphasis on behaviors and practices which enables administrators to understand and obtain knowledge about themselves and others. Questions such as "should we have a specific course designed to address the "isms", how should we address the "isms" in preparing educational leaders, and are we adequately preparing educational leaders to be able to deal with the "isms" will be the focus of discussion.

It is my belief that future and current administrators should take a course in the "isms". I do not believe that any administrator, future or current, can be effective in his or her role without having an opportunity to personally explore his or her biases, prejudices, values, beliefs, etc. This particular course that we have designed for our Educational Administration students at IPFW is one that can be taught in a group or can easily be done on an independent basis.

How many of us take the time to examine who we are as individuals on a regular basis? Mandatory participation in a course of this nature in a school administration program would allow educational leaders time to be reflective and consider their biases and prejudices. We cannot begin to develop a sensitivity and understanding of others until we begin to look internally and understand how we have become the individuals we are. Periodic self-examination is valuable if we are to build relationships with others who are not like us - physically, mentally, sexually, racially, and age wise.

During the twenty-first century being at a school that does not have students of color, handicapped, gay or lesbian will be nearly impossible for any educational leader. Additionally, I foresee more senior citizens being visible in the school setting as many educators postpone retirement and others fill part-time positions in the schools. As the move continues toward a gender-neutral society, administrators will also have to understand the importance of not defining roles based on gender.

The structure of this class is designed to allow considerable freedom, which is paramount to getting individuals involved in the 'isms'. One of my goals for this course is that after a few classes the student is able to step back and know that this course is one that has a less-centered professor role and offers them the opportunity to establish a sense of safety. A primary goal is for open, honest discussion to take place in a non-threatening environment. It is crucial in a course of this nature that the students feel a safe, supportive environment as they explore their feelings, values and emotions.

Since this is a required course for the persons in our Educational Administration program we cannot assume that those taking the class have a willingness to gain a better understanding of other ethnic groups, to reduce discrimination and prejudice, and to develop human relations skills. Reaching those educators and future administrators, who are not receptive to improving their knowledge base or understanding of themselves would not be an insurmountable obstacle. It is my firm belief that although administrators may be resistive to taking a class such as this, they would not leave the class as they entered it. I feel that completion of any of the course requirements will hopefully result in any administrator becoming more knowledgeable about himself or herself and others. Hopefully, they will look at students differently whether or not they chose to make positive changes.

Administrators set the atmosphere for the entire school. If more educational leaders and when I say educational leaders I mean both administrators and teachers, are educated about the 'isms', they can have a ripple effect throughout the school. More important, students would see the attitude of the administrators and teachers and hopefully, adopt attitude of tolerance and understanding.

Often, the prejudices and discrimination we feel toward others are based on misinformation and the fact that we do not develop positive human relation skills. We listen, but we do not hear. We talk, but we do not hear what we are really saying. We judge before we consider all the facts. We are silent when we should speak up. We do not ask questions when we should ask questions. One way to increase awareness and assist educational leaders in "celebrating the differences" is to require classes and long-term inservice programs. As the differences are being celebrated, the realization occurs that we have more similarities than differences. When we learn to view each other as human beings there will not be a need for classes such as this one. I would like to think and hope that each of our students that have completed this course will share what he or she has learned with other educators and administrators.

Regardless of how much research I have the students do in this course to investigate the 'isms', the factual side of how we as humans react to one another is always fascinating. Once can speculate, assume, posture on issues and points, and give opinions. However, what the actual data states on these 'isms' causes us to give it preeminence over our speculations, misinformation and ideas.

SEXISM - discrimination against women in educational administrative fields is still prevalent. Women comprise seventy per cent of all teachers. Few than six per cent of K-12 superintendents are women (according to a 1991 survey of all 50 state departments of education). The great problem is the ideology of American society and the ideology of individualism. Research by Bell and Chase suggests that it is a systemic problem. These authors challenged school boards in area of race and gender equity in hiring, evaluating, and retaining superintendents, that their selection process for consultants be a careful one. In order for the process to change, those that are "change agents" or have the "power to be change agents" must take the responsibility of choosing people who first can admit and identify the "barriers."

RACISM - Barriers exist because of many reasons and issues. In studying socioeconomic inequality in the Arab and Israelis labor force, I attempt to get the students in this course to see inequality from a different standpoint other than "color". Classism and cast systems are just as prevalent. Racism exits in many communities which have developed work enclaves to protect minority groups. There are economic disadvantages, with intergroup competition for the same jobs. According to Semyonov and Epstein, enclaves are successful. Outside the enclave many problems exists. Those who are within the enclaves find success and economic status. However, when they seek employment in outside job markets the racial factors become more of an influence in the success of the individual. Isolation and language barriers are also factors. Becoming a part of the regular mainstream and job market is still limited for special groups not in enclaves.

AGEISM - Age discrimination in higher education has not been a major issue. Although, now there are no mandatory retirement laws. Congress made mandatory retirement illegal for most employees in 1986. It exempted tenured professors until 1994. Special financial incentives and retirement packages are encouraging professors over 70 to retire. This is only one example of age discrimination that truly effects the sphere of education. Teaching students through interacting with the elderly must be expanded. We must foster the acceptance of cultures that respect the contributions of the aged. Using the elderly as mentors and viable participants in our society speaks volumes. Each individual who lives long enough will become a part of the age micro culture. We must all go through these stages of development and extension. Some how we are all interrelated with our experiences and cultures. Ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, sexual preference and gender very much interact with age to influence our behavior and attitudes.

HOMOPHOBIA - Anderson refers to gay and lesbian students as the "hidden minority". A shroud of silence hides the issue of sexual orientation for many homosexual students. Gay and lesbian adolescents have a suicide rate two times higher than that of heterosexual youths, ninety percent of child molesters are heterosexual married men. At least twenty-five million (10%) of the American population has had a homosexual experience. Fear and realities of life cause gay and lesbian people to keep their sexual identities hidden. He further states that training for teachers, counselors, and school staff members in crisis intervention and violence prevention are needed. School-based support groups should exists for gay and straight students. Methods of training administrators, teachers and students to become more sensitive to other groups different from themselves through organizations such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are very important. Not allowing name calling, bigoted statements and other slurs is crucial. We must EDUCATE - NOT SEPARATE or STIGMATIZE!

ABLEISM - this 'ism' is that set of assumptions and practices that promote unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed physical, mental, or behavioral

differences. For instance, we might assume that a faculty member with a physical disability will not be able to relate to the students because they do not have that same disability, or assuming that student with a physical disability also has a mental disability, and therefore, should be treated differently from the "normal" students. I pose the question to this audience today, "can anyone here write me a definition or better yet present me a typical youngster from a school setting that we could label 'normal'? Now, in this day and age with body piercing, purple and blue spiked hair and the fad of girls wearing boys clothes exactly how does one define normal?

Perhaps of all the qualities of functions of a school administrator there is none greater than the responsibility of ensuring the guaranteed rights of the students to an education and to provide an environment that is free of discrimination and bias. Not only is this responsibility to the students, but also to the staff of the school. The role of an educational leader as an instructional leader should be alert to the idea and support the idea of an environment that encourages each individual to realize and maximize their individual worth. For an educational leader to accomplish this, it is first necessary for that leader to believe this themselves. It is so critically important to recognize the individual differences of students and staff and respect their uniqueness. For the educational leader to accomplish this attitude to a greater scale it is essential that the this person is the instructional leader and convey this message to the staff and community. A greater environment can be created through the attitudes and beliefs of staff members than by just the educational leader alone. This message of recognizing cultural differences and respect for all persons can be conveyed much quicker also if this attitude is displayed by the administrator and not just spoken. It is therefore very essential that the educational leader take the lead in creating a climate that respects the individual student. When an environment that allows diversity to exist and all members are comfortable to express themselves without fear of harassment, prejudice, or ridicule, then and only then can we truly say that we have a "public education"

However, this attitude of respect must extend beyond the students. An educational leader must have this same kind of respect for school staff. They likewise must feel that the climate and environment is one that reflects and encourages the members to contribute without fear of banishment or ridicule. It would be tragic to exclude anyone from contributing to the making of an overall successful school environment and we as educational leaders are fools if we believe we can accomplish this attitude of success without all parties contributing. It would be a grave adversity to not have discovered a method or idea to help someone else because that idea was being suppressed of fear of reprisal, harassment, or discrimination. When we have created this environment then we are on target for effective learning and team collaboration. The sign of a truly good coach is one who recognizes each players unique talent, develops that talent, and then meshes the talents of the individuals into a truly powerful team. An educational leader likewise should recognize and develop the talent of the building for an effective unit. Perhaps in addition to an administrator's "open-door policy" there should also be an "open-mind policy"

There must be a correlation that exists not just between these 'isms', but all other 'isms' and phobias. If we could discover the relationship that exists between these and work toward the ending of all discrimination, we will truly be on our way toward educating our populace. It sounds complicated, but it might simply be a matter of taking away the labels, being mindful of derogatory descriptors, altering our speech and actions, and offering the respect to others that we ourselves desire. As educational leaders, we must understand that constitutional law provides an educational opportunity for all in an environment that exemplifies respect. And as educated human beings, it is simply the moral and right thing to do.

In closing, let me state that I feel there is so much to be learned by having a course in the 'isms'. Our course is titled Problems in Human Relations and Cultural Awareness. Developing human relations skills are essential in preventing problems and to evolve

In closing, let me state that I feel there is so much to be learned by having a course in the 'isms'. Our course is titled Problems in Human Relations and Cultural Awareness. Developing human relations skills are essential in preventing problems and to evolve strategies for problem resolution is a must. Learning about human behavior and how it relates to our effectiveness as educators must continue. This is why learning about our own prejudices and biases is essential. As educators we must continue to find ways to overcome obstacles of past programming and preconceived attitudes about others different from ourselves. How we handle this change is essential to our success and that of those we educate. There will always be people who are disenchanted with people of color and varied cultural backgrounds, different sexual preferences, physical ability and age. We cannot change the perceptions of others, however we can hopefully change our responses to their actions toward us so as not to continue the cycle. Finally, EDUCATE, EXPOSE and hopefully come CHANGE. "Each one, reach one" is a simple idea, but it has the potential to snowball and cause positive changes in our educational system.

At this time I would like for you to break in to small groups and I plan to give you some handouts with several scenarios to review and discuss the definitions of the 'isms' and have each group discuss some of the examples in the packet. In addition, I will be discussing with you the question of "What does our future look like?" and reviewing with you a staff development model program to use in working with your faculty or students.